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Handmaidens of God: The female figures Judith, Juliana, and Elene in Old English heroic poetry

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HANDMAIDENS OF GOD: THE FEMALE
FIGURES JUDITH, JULIANA, AND
ELENE IN OLD ENGLISH
HEROIC POETRY

ANITA OBERMEIER HODGE

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HANDMAIDENS OF GOD: THE FEMALE FIGURES JUDITH,
JULIANA, AND ELENE IN OLD ENGLISH HEROIC POETRY
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BY

ANITA OBERMEIER HODGE

THESIS

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Abstract

Generally the treatment of the female characters in Judith, Juliana, and Elene corresponds closely to the treatment given the Anglo-Saxon male heroic warrior. Traditionally these female figures have been regarded as male warriors in women's clothes, without anything complex or strongly dramatic in their character.

Helen Damico in her recent study of *Wealtheow* and the Valkyrie tradition, compares Judith, Juliana, and Elene to the Valkyrie figures of Old Norse Heroic Poetry. Damico coins the term "warrior-women" for the three female figures; however, the term demands modification and amplification.

Judith can be termed warrior-woman; on a literal level she heroically fights a physical enemy, and the martial imagery is prevalent in the poem. Juliana is a virgin-martyr, combining the traits of a warrior and a reluctant bride. Although the poem conveys a martial atmosphere, Juliana, for the most part, engages in spiritual warfare. In her struggle against the devil, she assumes the role of the archetypal female, thus evoking allusion to Eve and the Fall. Furthermore, she reflects the didactic role of the Church. Elene participates in no physical battle, but she depicts the image of a male warrior. In her spiritual battle for divine wisdom she struggles with the devil, who tries to prevent her from finding the buried cross. On an allegorical level Elene

is portrayed as Church in opposition to the Synagogue. Eventually she assumes the role of a peaceweaver, like Wealtheow.

Judith, Juliana are bestowed with God's Fortitudo and Sapientia; Elene is granted divine Sapientia at the end of the narrative. Thus the three female characters become handmaidens of God. Judith, Juliana, and Elene differ from the traditional epic male warrior in their spiritual struggle for God's heavenly kingdom. Since they are successful in their warfare, bestowed with divine wisdom, they become symbols for excellent behavior on earth, leading to salvation in heaven.

Generally the treatment of the female characters in Judith, Juliana, and Elene corresponds closely to the treatment given the Anglo-Saxon male heroic warrior. Traditionally these female figures have been regarded as male warriors in women's clothes, without anything complex or strongly dramatic in their characters.¹

The Anglo-Saxon heroic tradition centers around the comitatus, a military congregation of men in the battle fields and in the mead halls. The strongest social bond in the comitatus is the personal relationship between the lord and the thane. The thane's loyalty is encouraged and rewarded by treasure, which thus is associated with his honor, personal glory, and everlasting fame. The Anglo-Saxon hero is a man of great physical prowess, courage, and wisdom, applying his skills for the common welfare of his comitatus. His feats are difficult and dangerous, death being his constant companion. Further characteristics of the heroic warrior are his shining armor, his individual struggle, and for the Christian warrior, faith in God. In addition, the eagle, raven, and wolf are elements of the setting of an heroic battle,² symbolizing

¹ See Richard Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," Sewanee Review 4 (1895): 1-14 and Adelaide Evans Harris, "The Heroine of the Middle Ages," Cleveland: Western Reserve University Bulletin 1928.

² See, for example, The Battle of Maldon and The Battle of Brunanburh.

that the Anglo-Saxon heroic warrior is doomed to fail in battle at last.

Judith, Juliana, and Elene have been given attention in Helen Damico's recent study of Wealtheow and the Valkyrie tradition, Damico compares the Valkyrie figures of Old Norse heroic poetry to Wealtheow, concluding that she functions as a peaceweaver in Beowulf.³ The Valkyrie figures of Old Norse Literature are described as noble women with shining eyes and golden hair, welcoming the hero to Valhalla. Entirely supernatural they manifest few individualizing attributes.⁴ Damico then compares Judith, Juliana, and Elene to Wealtheow and the Valkyrie figures, arguing that Judith, Juliana, and Elene also show few individualizing attributes. Labeling them warrior-women Damico emphasizes their heroic traits as their most important characteristic.

I would propose a relabeling of Judith, Juliana, and Elene, for their present label of "warrior-women" lacks completeness and demands modification and amplification. Judith, the warrior-woman, Juliana, the virgin-saint, and Elene, the battle-queen and peaceweaver, function on literal, spiritual, and allegorical levels in the poems. Judith can be termed a warrior-woman; on a literal level

³ Helen Damico, Beowulf's Wealtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1984).

⁴ Damico 42.

she heroically fights a physical enemy, and the martial imagery is prevalent in the poem.

In Juliana, in contrast to Judith, the martial spirit is present to a much lesser degree. As a virgin-martyr, Juliana combines the traits of a warrior and a reluctant bride. On a literal level, the poem is a marriage poem about a woman defiantly rejecting the role of wife in favor of holy virginity. Although the poem conveys a martial atmosphere, Juliana, for the most part, engages in spiritual warfare. In her struggle against the devil, she assumes the role of the archetypal female, thus evoking comparisons to Eve and the Fall. With her example, Juliana reflects the didactic role of the Church, inviting fellow Christians to strengthen themselves against the assaults of the devil. Juliana can be called a virgin saint whose emphasis lies on the spiritual warfare.

Although Elene participates in no physical battle, she shows as guð cwen (battle-queen) the strength of will and courage required of male warriors. In her spiritual battle for divine wisdom, she struggles with the devil, who tries to prevent her from finding the buried cross, the giver of wisdom. On an allegorical level, Elene is portrayed as the Church in opposition to the Synagogue. Eventually, she assumes the role of a peaceweaver, like Wealtheow, by preserving the peace between the Jews and the Roman empire. Therefore, she can be named guð cwen and peaceweaver.

Judith, Juliana, and Elene in their individual struggle against physical and spiritual enemies display action, courage, verbal skill, and wisdom, qualities inherent in the male Anglo-Saxon warrior. Additionally, these female figures demonstrate strength of character and firmness of purpose. However, the wisdom of Judith and Juliana seems to be innate and God-given, appropriate for their spiritual warfare. Elene's wisdom is not innate but God-given as a fulfillment of her quest at the end of the narrative. The male Anglo-Saxon warrior acquires wisdom in the course of his life, mostly applying it in physical combat. Judith, Juliana, and Elene receive their wisdom from God; thus they are not acting in their own interest, but in the interest of God, which makes them "heroic handmaidens of God." In this function they turn into stark characters, indiscriminately subjugating their identity and individuality to God's will and thus becoming a universal symbol for exemplary behavior on earth for the attainment of salvation in heaven.

Damico observes that a dress of a metallic brightness is apparently conventional with military females. She bases her observation on the past participle form of hyrstan, (to adorn, to decorate). The noun hyrste, for example, means armor, decoration, and is used in the former sense in Elene: hilderincas, hyrstum gewerede (1.263), "the warriors were outfitted in armor." The metallic brightness is also attributed to Judith in line 171b golde

gefraetwode (gold-adorned), and the same expression is used in line 328b to describe the war trappings of the soldiers. The term is a part of the formulaic system that links the image of adornment with the gold of military equipment.⁵

The poem contains all the traditional elements of Germanic battle poetry: the shining armor, the individual struggle, the wolf, raven, and eagle, and all the epithets for brave warriors, which incidentally are applied to Judith as well. While the heroic attributes --soberness of mind, nobility of birth and courage in action-- are stressed, the heroic temperament apparently is equally appropriate to male and female. The warrior-woman Judith, the virgin-martyr Juliana, and the peaceweaver Elene all share this heroic temperament.

The three heroic Old English poems --whose heroes are women-- make some use of the ideal of fortitudo et sapientia.⁶ The question arises, however, about the appropriateness of this ideal for female heroes. Kaske applies the fortitudo et sapientia concept to Beowulf and gives the following definition of those qualities:

As the quality of the hero, fortitudo implies physical strength and courage consistently enough.

⁵ Damico 29.

⁶ R. E. Kaske, "Sapientia and Fortitudo in the Old English Judith," The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. Larry D. Benson, and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo: 1982) 13-29.

With regard to sapientia, we seem to have in Beowulf a general, eclectic concept including skill in words and works, knowledge of the past, ability to predict accurately, prudence, understanding, and the ability to choose and direct one's conduct rightly.⁷

Prowess and courage are not usually among the more prominent features of the women portrayed in Old English.

A modified combination of sapientia and fortitudo, in which sapientia is prevalent, as Kaske points out,⁸ seems appropriate for women. An analysis shows that the quality of the male hero consists of a combination of wisdom, courage and prowess, while the female heroine is attributed a form of innate divine wisdom. In contrast to the male warrior, her courage and prowess are obtained from elsewhere, namely God.⁹ Besides the fortitudo element of physical might and courage, Judith embodies the ideal of sapientia. Other features of Judith can to a lesser degree also be found in Juliana: a profundity and quickness of mind, sagacity of speech, thoughtful intent toward duty, and a shining physical appearance.

Most personages in heroic poetry, by definition, have origins in either biblical or historical events, and Judith is no exception. The Old English poem Judith is based on

⁷ R.E.Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1963) 272.

⁸ Kaske, Judith 15.

⁹ Kaske, Judith 15.

the Book of Judith in the Vulgate. In a comparison of the Vulgate text and the Anglo-Saxon work, James Doubleday found three major alterations. First, the Anglo-Saxon poet reduced the number of characters. Second, the Anglo-Saxon poet added the battle scene, and third, he placed a new emphasis on irony. The result of these changes is the concentration of the audience on a single dramatic confrontation between Judith and Holofernes.¹⁰ Their individual struggle is applied as a means of contrasting Judith's courage, eloquence, and divine wisdom with Holofernes's cowardice, debauchery, and stupidity.

Swa het se gumens baldor
fylgan fletsittendum oð faet fira bearnum
nealaehte niht seo ystre. Het ða niða geblondon
þa eadigan maegð ofstum fetigan
hringum gehrodene.¹¹

(32b-37a)

(So the lord of men ordered that the guests in the hall be filled until the dark night drew near the sons of men. Then, dazed with sins, he ordered the blessed maiden, blazoned with rings, adorned with bracelets, to be brought to his bed in his tent with haste.)

This passage shows that Judith is introduced only when Holofernes and his retainers are already drunk, so that the

¹⁰ See James F. Doubleday, "The Principle of Contrast in Judith," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 72 (1971): 436-41 and Jackson J. Campbell, "Schematic Technique in Judith," English Language History 38 (1971): 155-72.

¹¹ All quotations from Judith are taken from Bernard Huppe, The Web of Words (Albany: State U of New York P, 1970) 114-35.

contrast between her purity and vulnerability and their debauchery is strongly emphasized. After Judith has been brought to his tent, the emphasis shifts to the universal contrast between good and evil. Lines 58b-59a "*þohte a beorhtan idese mid widle and mid womme besmitan*" (he intended to defile the shining woman with filth and sin), express the theme of good versus evil, which is central to the poem.

Besides the theme of good versus evil, Judith's wisdom and courage are stressed throughout the poem. Judith's wisdom, along with her apparent courage in cutting off Holofernes' head, provides evidence for the two heroic virtues, sapientia and fortitudo. Before the beheading, each of the three stages of the narrative involving her is accompanied by an explicit demonstration of her wisdom. Her wisdom is first mentioned when she seeks Holofernes:

*þæt waes þy feorðan dogore
 þæs 7e Judith hyne gleaw on geðonce
 ides aelfscinu aerest gesohte.*

(12b-14b)

(That was on the fourth day from the time that
 Judith, wise in thought, a woman of fair beauty,
 first sought him.)

The second example of her wisdom appears, when the retainers are commanded to bring Judith to him:

*Bearhtme stopon
 to 7am gysterne þær hie Judithe
 fundon ferhðgleawe.*

(39b-41a)

(They at once marched to the guest-chamber, where they found Judith, wise of mind.)

And the third mention of her wisdom occurs when Holofernes's retainers escort her to his bedchamber:

Hie \mathfrak{X} a on reste gebrohton
snude \mathfrak{X} a snoteran idese.

(54b-55a)

(Then they hastily led the wise woman to bed.)

After Holofernes's arrival Judith's wisdom seems dramatized in her prayer to God, who grants her the necessary courage to carry out her heroic deed. In her prayer she longs for liberation from the evils of a ravager:

Hi \mathfrak{X} a hehsta dema
aedre mid elne onbryde, swa he de \mathfrak{X} anra gewylcene
herbuendra \mathfrak{p} e hyne him to helpe sece \mathfrak{X}
mid raede and mid rihte geleafan.
 \mathfrak{p} a wea \mathfrak{r} hyre rume on mode
haligre hyht geniwod.

(94-98)

(Then the highest Judge inspired her immediately with courage, as He does all men here on earth, who seek His aid with wisdom and right faith. Then to the holy woman's heart came strength and hope renewed.)

This passage indicates that Judith has already been in possession of wisdom when she appealed to God for assistance, and now receives courage. It also implies that God will, indeed, grant courage to everyone who demonstrates wisdom by praying to Him.

In the following passage Judith applies the courage that was granted to her by cutting off Holofernes's head, a deed demonstrating an individual struggle, a traditional

element of the battle scenes of the conventional setting of the Anglo Saxon warrior poems.

Sloh ~~ð~~ eornoste ides ellenrof o~~p~~re si~~g~~e
~~p~~one hea~~t~~enan hund ~~p~~aet him ~~p~~aet heafod wand
for~~ð~~ on ~~ð~~a flore.

(108-11a)

(Then the courageous lady struck terribly the heathen hound a second time so that his head rolled on the floor.)

Judith's wisdom is present from the beginning of the narrative on; but after Holofernes' death Judith has also attained fortitudo, now possessing both heroic virtues. In the last part of the poem three more allusions to her wisdom occur:

Haefde ~~ð~~a gefohten foremaerne blaed
Judith aet gu~~d~~e swa hyre god u~~d~~e
swelges ealdor ~~p~~e hure sigores onleah.
~~p~~a seo snotere maeg~~ð~~ snude gebrohte.

(122-25)

(Then Judith in hard battle had gained by fight abounding glory, as God, the Lord of heaven had bestowed upon her, He granted her the victory. Then the wise maiden hastily pressed....)

God's gift of courage to Judith is juxtaposed to a reference to her wisdom:

Wiggend saeton
weras waeccende wearde heoldon
in ~~ð~~am faestenne swa ~~ð~~am folce aer
geormormodum Judithe bebead
searo~~n~~col maeg~~ð~~ ~~p~~a heo on si~~d~~ gewat
ides ellenrof. Waes ~~ð~~a eft cumen
leof to leodum. Ond ~~ð~~a lungre het
gleawhydig wif gumena sumne
of ~~ð~~aere ginnan byrig hyre togeanes gan.

(141-49)

(Warriors were sitting, the waiting men, keeping watch at the stronghold, as Judith, the wise maiden

had earlier commanded the people sorrowful in mind, when she departed on her journey, the courageous woman. Then the beloved woman had returned to her people, and the wise maiden quickly commanded one of the men from the spacious city to come to meet her.)

Her exhortation to the people is preceded by an epithet emphasizing her wisdom and an action clearly demonstrating the results of her courage:

þa seo gleawe het golde gefraetwod
hyre ðinenne þancelmode
þaes herewæðan heafod onwriðan,
ond hyt to behðe blodig aetywan
þam burhleodum hu hyre aet beaduwe gespeow.

(171-75)

(Then the wise one, adorned with gold, commanded her attentive servant to uncover the head of the warrior and reveal its bloodiness to the city dwellers as a sign of her success in battle.)

Furthermore, the victory of the Bethulians over the Assyrians is followed by a passage attributing the ending of the battle to Judith's wisdom and courage.

Eal þæt ða ðeodguman þrymne geeodon
cene under cumblum on compwige
þurh Judithe gleawe lare
maegð modigre.

(331-34)

(All the warriors, brave under their banners, had won by power in the battlefield through the wise counsel of Judith, the courageous maiden.)

At the end of the narrative, when Judith's comitatus presents her with the battle booty won from the Assyrians, the last reference to her wisdom is made: she is described as gearoþoncolre (quick-witted, 341a). At this point, Mushabac detects a particular strong case of Judith's

sapientia.¹² Her ability to reject the treasure, whose main threat is that it may incite pride and avarice, that in turn produce malitia and avaritia, clearly exhibits her wisdom.¹³ Judith is a beahhroden, a ringgiver; to be thus in a heroic society is to embody a central value, generosity.¹⁴ The giving and receiving of rings is a sign not only of wealth and largess, but also of interaction with one's fellow people. Nevertheless, beahhroden in Judith's case does not depict generosity but rather the wisdom and strength of a faithful woman withstanding the spiritual dangers of treasure. The theme of infinite Sapientia et Fortitudo of God as the source of all human finite sapientia et fortitudo hovers over the poem. To put it plainly, Judith's finite wisdom stems from God's infinite wisdom. If God were not her protector and granter of wisdom, she might be doomed to fail in her quest to eliminate her and her people's enemies.

The Old English poet has dramatized an example of biblical armed violence, performed by a woman, through

¹² Jane Mushabac, "Judith and the Theme of Sapientia et Fortitudo," Massachusetts Studies in English 4 (1973) 4.

¹³ This feature of Judith parallels Beowulf's attitude towards treasure. The two poems are in the same codex, and it is widely agreed that they both were written by the same scribe. See Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Christian Persepective in Beowulf," An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1963) 373-86.

¹⁴ Again Judith depicts the same traits as her famous male counterparts Beowulf and Hrothgar.

manipulation of the heroic ideal sapientia et fortitudo: Judith, the already wise heroine, is granted special courage by God for a task of unwomanly violence --in the point of view of the 20th century reader--, thus becoming both His instrument for the salvation of her people and a testimony of his omnipresent providence.¹⁵ Jane Mushabac accepts Kaske's point of view,¹⁶ basing her judgment on an observation by Edna Purdie:

The heroic activity of the epic commonly implies the assertion of individuality --as in Beowulf...in Judith we find this activity made powerful by the surrender of the personal will to the will of God.¹⁷

According to Purdie, Judith subjugates her personal will to God's interest in rescuing the people of Israel. In the subjugating of Judith's personal will, Purdie sees Judith's individuality emphasized.

Bernard Huppé opposes Purdie's reading of the character of Judith:

For to seek for Judith's personality, or her individuality, her identity, is to seek not only in vain, but mistakenly. Judith is a romanesque statue, chiseled in rigid simplicity, without personal expression, yet alive because she emblemizes the heroic virtue of faith and its triumph over the forces of evil."¹⁸

Huppé views Judith as an emblemized heroine, because

¹⁵ Kaske, Judith 29.

¹⁶ Mushabac 9.

¹⁷ Edna Purdie, "The Story of Judith in German and English Literature," Bibliothèque de la Revue de Littérature Comparée (1927): 28. (qut. in Mushabac 9.)

¹⁸ Huppé 157.

Judith's actions and words are formulaic, reducing her to a nergendes þeowen (servant of God, 73b-74a), chosen by him to rescue Israel. I disagree with Huppé's remark about Judith's implied lack of personal expression, since, although her prayers may consist of formulaic lines, they nevertheless express the genuine concern of a woman to protect herself against a diabolic pagan, both physically and spiritually:

þa waes nergendes
 þeowen /rymful þearle gemyndig
 hu heo þone atolan eaðost mihte
 ealdre benaeman aer se unsyfra
 womfull onwoce.

(73b-77a)

(Then the handmaiden of the lord was sorely mindful of how she may take the beast's life most effectively, before he awoke, hateful in sin.)

This passage, I would argue, demonstrates the inversion of a conventional situation. Judith is pondering how she could possibly escape the beast Holofernes. Furthermore there are sexual overtones in Judith's battle with Holofernes. He is penetrated by her sharp sword scurum heardne (hard in the storm of battle, 79a), evoking the sexual act. The aggressive, swordbearing "virgin" contrasts with the passive, swordless man, resulting in a reversal of the sexual roles. Judith's possession of the phallic symbol evokes the image of a man. The conventional situation would have been Holofernes raping and defiling her, but this was reversed by her beheading him. His decapitation can be interpreted as the symbolic rape of a man by a woman. The symbol of the sword thus functions in

two traditional ways here. It represents both the sexual organ and the cross, the latter from which Judith draws her strength and courage.

Further evidence for Judith's heroic character is found in an analysis of the parallels between Judith and her maid, which shows that the same epithets are applied to both women. That is an anomalous practice, since the attribute beahhroden (ring-adorned, 138b), would conform neither with the maid's social status nor with her function in the poem. She neither functions as a treasure giver, nor is she beahhroden as an allurement for a man.

Eodon ða gegnum þanonne
 þa idesa ba ellenþriste
 oð þaet hie becomon collenferhðe
 eadhredige maegð ut of ðam herige
 þaet hie sweetollice geseon mihten
 þaere wlitegan byrig weallas blincan
 Bethuliam. Hie ða beahhrodene
 feðelaste for onettan
 oð hie glaedmode gegen heafdon
 to ðam wealgate.

(132b-141a)

(The two valorous women went in haste, bold at heart, the triumphant maidens, until they had left the enemy host, and then they might clearly behold Bethulia, the shining city with shimmering walls. Ring-adorned, they hastened their pace until, glad at heart, they had reached the gate in the wall.)

This passage depicts the quite liberal relationship between a female warrior and her servant. The relationship resembles the lord-thane relationship, an argument supported in the martial imagery conveyed in collenferhðe (bold in courage, 134b), weallas blincan

(shimmering walls, 137b) and beahhroden (ring-adorned, 138b). Judith entrusts her servant with Holofernes' head in order to carry it to Bethulia as a token of Judith's triumph. In line 127b the maid is referred to as forgenga (one who goes before) evoking the image of the standard-bearer in an Anglo-Saxon heroic battle poem.

The cluster of epithets --ellenpriste, collenferhðe, eadhreðige maegð -- not only distinguishes the women as heroic figures, but also defines them as a character-pairing, "a characterization device whereby a minor figure is endowed with similar (or contrasting) traits belonging to the hero in an effort to enhance the person of the hero himself."¹⁹ The heroic qualities of Judith are properties of her maid as well: the maid too is thoughtful and prudent, decorous and "excellent in manners." In a way the servant is a mirror-image of her mistress, possessing her heroic qualities of superiority of mind, conduct, courage, and obedience. The attribute beahhrodene furthermore unites the two women in a heroic sense, suggesting that they should not be regarded as servant and mistress, but as victors in a campaign against the enemy. Triumphantly carrying Holofernes' head, their precious battle-prize, they sneak out of the Assyrian camp together, and with outstanding courage they march through the host of an invading army.

¹⁹ Damico 32-33.

The heroic ideal of sapientia et fortitudo, often applied to Beowulf, can be applied to Judith, for she demonstrates her courage and wisdom throughout the poem. Nevertheless, her wisdom and strength are only of a human quality and have to be supported by God's infinite Sapientia and Fortitudo. In order to secure the deliverance of the Hebrew people, God chose Judith as a heroic handmaiden, demanding, though, complete subjugation of her interest to His. Consequently, she becomes a symbol for desirable demeanor on earth, which will help her to attain salvation, since she kept soðne geleafan (true faith, 344b).

In comparison to Judith, Juliana is a less flexible character. The Old English poem follows closely the rigid pattern of the passion of a virgin-martyr. Although Juliana functions in a martial environment, she almost completely lacks the features of a traditional epic hero as defined in Beowulf and other heroic battle poems. Juliana wages spiritual combat, words being her weapons.

Initially one may mistake her for a traditional epic protagonist when she takes a victory-or-death stance to Heliseus's marriage proposal:

"Naefre þu þæs swiðlic sar gegearwast
 þurh haestne nið heardne wita,²⁰

²⁰ All quotations from Juliana are taken from The Exeter Book, ed. G. P. Krapp, and E. V. K. Dobbie (New York: Columbia UP, 1936) 113-33.

þaet þu mec onwende worda þissa."

(55-57)

("You shall never in your fierce hatred bestow pain
so sore of grievous torments as to turn me from
those words.")

Juliana demonstrates absolute conviction of her faith and her fate. She foresees what will happen to her partially because she is familiar with the atrocious brutality performed around and later done to her. Later in the poem, we see that spiritual, not physical, prowess is the measure of significant action. Active physical force, on Juliana's part, is missing as a legitimate method of achieving victory.²¹ Militant physical aggression is consistently associated with the despicable characters:

Maximianes, se geond middangeard
arleas cyning, eahtnysse ahof
cwealde cristne men, circan fylde,
geat on graeswong godhergendra,
haefen hildfruma, halrigra blod,
ryhtfremmendra.

(3-8a)

(Maximian, the cruel king, the heathen war-chief, who stirred up persecution throughout the world, slew Christian men, tore down churches, spilled on the grassy plain the blood of saints, the worshippers of God, the doers of right.)

The poet gives examples of the appalling atrocities committed by the pagan emperor and his soldiers. The pagans can achieve victory only through physical combat, while Juliana wages spiritual warfare with the help of

²¹ Claude Schneider, "Cynewulf's Devaluation of Heroic Tradition in Juliana," Anglo-Saxon England 7 (1978): 110.

God's wisdom. It is evident that the emphasis is placed upon the heroine's spiritual virtue and religiosity, but little is made of her physical appearance. She is distinguished by epithets expressing the radiant brightness of the sun, sunsciene (like the sun in beauty, 229a) and wlitescyne (brilliant countenance, 454a). Although she is a luminous figure, her brightness is not that associated with armor, as is the case for Judith. In lines 166-68 she becomes luminosity itself:

"Min se swetesta sunnan scima,
Juliana! Hwaet, þu glaem hafast,
ginfaeste giefte, geogudhades blaed!"

("My sweetest shining of the sun, Juliana! What radiance you have, generous grace, glory of youth!")

Radiance, a symbol for Christ, is appropriate for Juliana, since as a virgin-martyr, she preserves her purity and virginity for God. Furthermore, as a handmaiden to God, she enters at Christ's side into the struggle against the devil.

In Juliana the ideal of sapientia and fortitudo seems to rest on the assumption that while Juliana does indeed possess both wisdom and courage, her courage is a virtue not normally seen in a woman, and it exists only as a result of her Christian wisdom.²² Since she knows that God is her protector, she does not fear any of the appalling atrocities she must endure. A possible early foreshadowing of the theme of sapientia et fortitudo

²² Kaske, Judith 17.

appears in the dispute with her father, where in the introduction of two speeches she is characterized by the epithets gleaw (wise, 131) and unforhte (fearless, 147). The term unforhte is applied to Juliana again in line 601b, when the judge commands her beheading.

The stress on her courage reaches a peak with the devil's statements of amazement at finding such boldness in a woman:

"þu me aerest saga,
hu þu gedyrstig þurh deop gehygd
wurde þus wigþrist ofer eall wifa cyn,
þaet þu mec þus faeste fetrum gebunde,
aeghwaes orwigne."

(430b-34a)

("First you tell me how you, daring, through deep thought, became so bold in battle beyond all the race of woman, that you could bind me thus, fast in fetters, entirely defenseless.")

The phrase "gedyrstig þurh deop gehygd" juxtaposes Juliana's courage and wisdom. In that passage the devil also admits the spiritual warfare between himself and Juliana.

Later he says that none of the patriarchs or prophets was bold enough to lay hand on him as Juliana has done, even though God bestowed wisdom upon them:

"Ne waes aenig þara
þaet me þus þriste, swa þu nu þa,
halig mid hondum, hrinan dorste,
naes aenig þaes modig mon ofer eorðan
þurh halge meaht, heahfaedra nan
ne witgena. Peah þe him weoruda god
onwriga, wuldres cyning, wisdomes gaest,
giefe unmaete, hwaefre ic gong to þam
agan moste. Naes aenig þara
þaet mec þus bealdlice bendum bilgede,
þream forþfrycte, aer þu nu þa

þa miclan meaht mine oferswiðdest,
feste forfenge."

(510-22a)

("There was none of them who dared lay hands upon me as boldly as you in your holiness now; there was no man on earth brave enough through holy strength, none of the patriarchs nor prophets, though the God of hosts, the king of glory had bestowed upon them the spirit of wisdom, measureless grace, yet I could have access to them. There were none who thus boldly laid hands upon me, overwhelmed with miseries, before you who now have conquered, finally seized my great power.")

Although God bestows wisdom upon the prophets and patriarchs, they fail in resisting the devil. Juliana, in contrast, succeeds in her spiritual warfare, seizing the devil's great power. Consequently, Juliana's wisdom must differ from the prophets' and patriarchs', or maybe they fail to apply it properly.

His final lament speaks of her boldness as "perverse" among women:

"ic to soþe wat
þæt ic aer ne sið aenig ne mette
in worlðrice wif þe gelic,
þristran geþohtes ne þweorhtimbran
maegþa cynnes. Is on me sweotul
þæt þu unscame aeghwaes wurde
on ferþe frod."

(547b-53a)

("I know truly that I never met a woman like you in the worldly kingdom before or since, one of bolder thought or more perverse among the race of women. It is evident to me that you are completely guiltless, wise in mind.")

Again, the devil acknowledges her courage and wisdom, as well as her purity. Besides her fortitudo and sapientia, Juliana has her moment of fear and doubt, as Judith, when left alone with the devil. Juliana, like Judith, appeals

to God for help:

þa waes seo faemne for þam faerspelle
 egsan geaclad, þe hyre se aglaeca,
 wuldres wiferbreca, wordum seagde.
 Ongan þa faestlice ferð stapelian,
 geong grondorleas, to gode cleopian:
 "Nu ic þec, beorna hleo, biddan wille
 ece aelmihtig, þurh þæt æþele gesceap
 þe þu, faeder engla, aet fruman settest,
 þæt þu me ne laete of lofe hweorfan
 þinre eadgife, swa me þes ar bodað
 frecne faerspel, þe me fore stonde.
 Swa ic þe, bilwitne, biddan wille
 þæt þu me gecyðe, cyninga wuldor,
 þrymnes hyrde, hwaet þes þegn sy,
 lyftlacende, þe mec laere from þe
 on stearcne weg."

(267-82a)

(Then the maiden was terrified with horror at the sudden tidings, which the demon, heaven's foe, told her in words. Then the young maid in her innocence began to establish her soul with firmness, to call unto God: "Now, protector of men, everlasting, almighty, I pray to you that your noble creation which you, Father of angels, did set up in the beginning, that you let me not lose worship of your grace according to the perilous tidings which the messenger announces, who stands in front of me. So I pray to you in your purity, Glory of kings, Guardian of splendour, to reveal to me who this servant is who flies in the air, who in your name urges me to an evil path.")

Momentarily Juliana is terrified because she thinks God has abandoned her, but then with the help of her Christian wisdom, she calls upon God for enlightenment about the angel's identity and promptly receives an answer. Again it seems that God bestows courage and wisdom upon the faithful Juliana. Juliana's prayer exhibits formulaic lines, like Judith's, but it is again a genuine expression of a physically and spiritually endangered woman.

When struggling with the devil, Juliana engages in

individual combat, a commonplace of heroic poetry, in am engan hofe (the narrow place, 532a) also typical of heroic poetry. By employing a heroic setting for a spiritual poem, Cynewulf implies that a battle for spiritual salvation is as viable a subject matter as a physical battle scene.

Juliana's rejection of Heliseus's wealth places her on the same level with Judith, Beowulf, and Hrothgar; yet Juliana lies outside the heroic epic tradition, for Heliseus's treasure is not associated with honor. The reader learns that Heliseus is a wealthy man of civic authority: waes aehtwelig (of noble birth, 18a), rice gerefa (wealthy man, 19a), rondburgum weold (he commanded cities, 19b), and heold hordgestreon (possessed a store of treasure, 22a). Yet immediately afterwards the reader is told that he is a heathen "ofer word godes, weoh gesohte/neode geneahhe" (against God's word he sought false gods and idols, 23-24a). Juxtaposed to that passage is Juliana's attitude towards treasure:

Hire waes godes egða
mara in gemyndum, þonne eall þæt mapþumgesteald
þe in þæs ætelinges æhtum wunade.

(35b-37)

(The fear of God was greater in her thoughts than all the treasure which resided in the noble's possession.)

Juliana's disregard of and scorn for Heliseus's wealth, mentioned more than once (e.g. 41b-44), sets her spiritual values in contrast to his own worldly ones and stands as a

symbol for the incompatibility of their worlds.

In her struggle against the demon, Juliana is told by a heavenly voice to grasp the fiend and bind him in fetters.

Hyre stefn oncwæð
 wlitig of wolcnum, word hleoþrade:
 "Forfoh þone fraetgan ond faeste geheald,
 oppaet he his siðfaet secge mid ryhte,
 ealne from orde, hwaet his æþelu syn."

(282b-86)

(A glorious voice answered her from the clouds, uttered a speech: "Seize that proud one and hold him fast, until he tells his whole mission truthfully, from the beginning, what his kinship is.")

Yet her carrying out of God's command should not be interpreted as a physical struggle; the passage depicts no physical struggle. Cynewulf emphasizes her verbal persuasiveness rather than her physical force when she compels the devil to tell her the truth about himself, his kinship, and his method of perverting and capturing souls. Through her spiritual fortitudo, the virgin-martyr Juliana causes a reversal of the victor/victim relationship by capturing and humiliating her antagonist, whom she forces into submission and confession of his own defeat. Judith also reverses the victor/victim relationship.

On an allegorical level Juliana evokes allusions to Eve and the Fall, emphasizing the aspect of wisdom. Heliseus's marriage proposal to Juliana can be equated to the devil's attacks on Juliana's soul. Furthermore, her soul is a symbol for the spiritual union between every Christian and Christ. For instance, in the prison passage

cited above, Juliana reverses the situation of the Fall in paradise by recognizing the devil in disguise, a deed which Eve failed to accomplish, thus bringing about man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Juliana assumes the role of the archetypal female grappling with archetypal evil. The devil lures Eve, Juliana's biblical parallel, into accepting the apple. By eating that fruit, she expects to gain divine wisdom, as the serpent has promised her. God denies Eve His wisdom; Juliana however, is endowed with His Sapientia and Fortitudo, employing it this time to defeat the devil. The difference between Eve and Juliana lies in their different approach to divine wisdom. Eve wants to gain wisdom through her own effort, while Juliana is chosen by God as a handmaiden.

þa se dema het
aswebban sorgcearig þurh sweordbite
on hyge halge, heafde bineotan
Christe gecorene.

(602b-05a)

(Then the judge in his anger ordered the maiden holy in spirit to be killed by a sword blow, the chosen of Christ, to have her head cut off.)

Juliana is chosen as a handmaiden to reveal the devil as the tempter of mankind and bear herself as a symbol of faith and wisdom.

Traditionally woman is often correlated to the serpent because of the seductive power of the latter. Therefore, Eve's image is one of a seductress, both in Saxon and modern times. Eve's seductive power makes herself

prone to seduction by the devil. Juliana reverses that archetype in that she is depicted as a virgin, pure and faithful. Unlike Eve, Juliana is not a seductress, and therefore, cannot be seduced herself. That the devil appears as a "simulacrum of the divine"²³ in the form of an angel supports the suggestion that even the devil concedes to Juliana a certain amount of wisdom,²⁴ and views her as more difficult to seduce than Eve, where he succeeds in the disguise of an detestable serpent.²⁵

The drama of the contest between the archetypal female and the archetypal devil depends on Cynewulf's conception of the encounter as a ritualistic series of attempts to turn Juliana away from her faith. By doing so, satan acts like Heliseus; he too describes his activity as a parodic missionary and teacher.²⁶

Margaret Bridges regards the poet's whitening of Juliana and the blackening of Heliseus as instrumental in heightening the antagonism.²⁷ Cynewulf extended the

²³ Margaret Enid Bridges, "Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry," ed., Anglistica 22 (Copenhagen: Rosengilde and Bagger, 1984) 29.

²⁴ See passages 430b-34a and 547b-53a from Juliana cited above.

²⁵ Juliana is the only example in Old English poetry where the devil assumes a pleasant disguise. See Bridges 29.

²⁶ Daniel G. Calder, Cynewulf, ed., Twayne's English Authors Series 327 (Boston: Twayne, 1981) 93.

²⁷ Bridges 23.

"exordial contrast between pagan persecutor and Christian"²⁸ victim to a contrast between man's lecherous love of woman and the virgin's chaste love of God. For the virgin-martyr the approach of a man can be equated with an assault by the devil. On a spiritual level the Church is married to Christ, Christ being the bridegroom and the Church the bride. Furthermore, the virgin-saint scorns sexual contact with men, since she chooses to reserve her love and virginity for Christ, whom she regards as her spiritual bridegroom.

Hio in gaeste baer
halge treowe, hogde georne
paet hire maeg had mana gehwylces
fore Christes lufan claene geheolde.

(28b-31)

(She bore in her spirit holy faith; she earnestly resolved to keep virginity for the love of Christ unspotted by sin.)

The Anglo-Saxon poem emphasizes Juliana's dedication of her virginity to God, a point not found in the Latin texts, though it is a commonplace of other lives of virgin-martyrs.²⁹ Women saints behave heroically by refusing to succumb to natural sexual desires conventionally associated with the female. The description of sado-masochistic

²⁸ Bridges 23.

²⁹ Rosemary Woolf, "Saints' Lives," Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley (London: 1966) 45.

torture often veils with evident sexual symbolism the act of intercourse, or else it lingers over the description of the virgin's rape. The virgin-martyr becomes a type of the feminine soul joined with Christ to become a Miles Christi. She scorns sexual contact with men because in a sense she finds fulfillment in a spiritual bond with the Christ, her notion of a perfect man. The symbolic wedding of the female soul and Christ resembles the union of Christ and the Church. Therefore, the threat of seduction of the virgin martyr by a human male symbolically represents the devil's adulterous assault on the female soul and thus on Church.³⁰ Juliana withstands the devil's attack through her God-given fortitudo and her Christian sapientia, thus becoming a symbol for a successful combat against the forces of evil.

Juliana's fortitudo and sapientia is augmented by the devil's praising the Saint's supremacy in combat and confessing his defeat, a confession tinged with admiration and genuine fear. Juliana's fortitudo contrasts with the devil's temerity; he shows almost more fear of Juliana's power than of Christ's. In a sense he puts her upon a pedestal above the rest of womankind, although the devil considers her more perverse than the rest of the race of women, implying that Juliana has an innate inclination

³⁰ Jane Chance Nitzsche, "The Anglo-Saxon Woman as Hero," Allegorica 5 (1980) 143-44.

towards perversity. Presumably the devil is hinting at her stoic, rather happy, enduring of all the abominable tortures applied to her. Being usually successful in corrupting souls, he cannot fully grasp her unshakeable devotion to God, and therefore applies the term "perverse" to her. Her mental tenacity, expressed in gemyndig, is characterized by Heliseus as wiferhyccgendre, and dol-willen, (obstinacy and folly, 451) and assures her victory over the demon.

Moreover, Juliana's exultant attitude toward death seems alien to the reader. She submits to her final torment not so much with courage as with enthusiasm.

þa wearð aere halgan hyht geniwa
 ond þæs maegdenes mod miclum geblissad,
 siþþan heo gehyrde haeled eahtian
 inwitrune, þæt hyre endestaef
 of gewindagum weorþan sceolde,
 lif alysed.

(607-12a)

(Then the hope of the saint was renewed, and the virgin's heart greatly cheered, when she heard men declare their malicious counsel, that her final day of trouble had come, her will be freed.)

The epic hero appreciates the earthly life, fighting in heroic battles against its loss; but to Juliana, death is a welcome escape from the atrocities of this world. Unlike the traditional hero, Juliana can draw upon divine, not merely human, strength to survive her struggle. The traditional hero undertakes the heroic challenge as a human being subject to the chance and necessity of human weak-

ness, and his courage is consequently more impressive.³¹

Juliana does not rely on human strength, for when she is thrust into the raging flames, an angel of the Lord comes to disperse the fire and free her:

Pa cwom engel godes
fraetwum blincan ond paet fyr tosceaf,
gefreode on gefreoðade facnes claene,
leahtra lease, ond pone lig towearp,
heorogiferne, paer seo halie srod,
maegpa bealdor, on pam midle gesund.

(563b-68)

(Then came an angel of God, gleaming in adornments, and thrust away the fire; freed and fended her who was untouched by malice and without sins; and cast away the devouring flame where the saint, chief of maidens, stood unharmed in the midst.)

In this poem Cynewulf has manipulated the measure of heroism, because Juliana, the "heroine," is essentially unlike the traditional epic hero. The villains have inherited the values of heroic society, often in a debased form. That may lead us to the conclusion that Cynewulf put the traditional hero at distance, establishing new values and types of action in Juliana.

A further analysis of the martial imagery suggests that there is a distinction between the antithetical imagery whose various repetitions illustrate the structural principle of spiritual combat and the images of warfare itself. The martial imagery in Juliana is especially interesting insofar as it evokes the narrative's most prevalent structural characteristic, the spiritual warfare, as

³¹ Schneider 116.

theme. The martial terminology elaborates on the allegory of Christian warfare. Juliana, as a handmaiden of God, armed with virginity, conquers satan. The devil refers to her as a metodes cempan (brave warrior, 383), who successfully resists the assaults of the diabolic aggressor. In the allegory of the spiritual warfare, the besieged Christian resists the attack of the flanþracu (devil's arrow, 384a) with superior weapons of the mind: bord (buckler, 385b), halig scyld (holy shield, 386b), gaestlic guðreaf (spiritual armor, 387a), which denote her sapientia (hugesnottor, wisely, 386a) and fortitudo (ellenrof, brave, 382b; modig, valiant, 383a; beald, bold, 388a, and faeste, firm, 389a.)

At the end of the narrative, Juliana fulfills her role as a handmaiden of God by giving her farewell speech to bystanders. The identity of the bystanders is not specified beyond the term folc (people, 639), but both tone and content confirm that Cynewulf's Juliana is addressing a sympathetic audience, not an antagonistic one. She fulfills the avowed purpose of strengthening her audience in their faith, so that they may attain the supreme recompense. She exhorts her fellow Christians to strengthen the walls of their houses against storma scurum (the assaults of the devil, 647-52a). Additionally, her example stands as an invitation to imitation, as is suggested by the fact that in all versions of the speech the martyr humbly asks those present to pray for God's

mercy for herself.

"Bidda^ð bearn godes þaet me brego engla,
meotud moncynnes, milde geweorpe,
sigora sellend. Sibb sy mid eowic,
symle so lufu."

(666-69a)

("Pray the Son of God that the Prince of angels, the Lord of mankind, the Bestower of victories, be merciful unto me! Peace be with you, true love forever!")

Juliana's enduring of torture and her spiritual combat depict a different kind of heroism, dismissing most traits of the traditional epic hero. Juliana, chosen by God to be His handmaiden in the struggle against the fiend, emblemizes a whole new set of values, Christian values. Unlike the traditional epic hero she fights not for the welfare of her comitatus, but for personal religious integrity. Juliana is less flexible than Judith because Juliana is driven by religious enthusiasm, entirely subjugating her identity to God in order to serve his glory.

Elene, in contrast to Juliana, demonstrates greater flexibility as a character, since she undergoes a transformation at the end of the narrative by gaining divine wisdom. In Elene the martial imagery is predominant in the first part of the poem, where Constantine, like a traditional epic Anglo-Saxon hero, defends his society against an invading army. Constantine's epithets --hildfruma (battleprince, 10), hereteman (army leader,

10), and guðscrad³² (war-guardian, 14)-- show the martial character of that first section. Moreover, spiritual and corporal battle here are closely juxtaposed. Elene wages the battle to convert her spiritual enemies while Constantine fights physical antagonists.

Elene herself is characterized by the heroic epithets sigecwen (victorious queen, 260) and guðcwen (warrior-queen, 331). Further epithets define her status as an aristocratic woman --caeseres maeg (kinswoman of the emperor, 330) and cwen selest (venerable queen, 1170). Again when speaking to the warriors, she is splendidly adorned :

"þrunгон þa on þreate, aer on þrymme bad
in cynestole caseres maeg,
geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted."

(329-331)

(Then they pressed together in a crowd, where the emperor's kinswoman waited in majesty on her throne, the stately warlike queen decked with gold.)

Geatolic and golde gehyrsted evoke strong military associations and convey the metallic and martial character that describes the splendid byrnies of the warrior-queen and her comitatus on their march toward Jerusalem. Although Elene is depicted as a warrior-queen, Kaske completely rejects Elene as a sapientia et fortitudo ideal,

³² All quotations from Elene are taken from Elene, An Old English Poem, ed. Charles W. Kent, (1889; New York: AMS, 1973).

arguing that it is applied to Judas instead,³³ who after being praised repeatedly for wisdom is said to be wordcraeftes wis (wise of eloquence, 592) and bald in meȝle (bold in council, 593).

I agree with Kaske in regard to Elene's fortitudo, but concerning her sapientia, I find his approach is too limited. Elene's fortitudo can rather be called fearlessness, because she does set out to find the buried cross; however her boldness is more understandable since she is in a superior position, unlike Judith and Juliana. Elene behaves like a warrior-queen, dealing with a subjected poeple supported by a splendid comitatus:

Hwonne heo sio guȝcwen gumena preate
ofer eastwegas oft gesohte.
paer waes on eorleȝe gesyne
brogden byrne ond bill gecost,
geatolic guȝscrud, grimhelm manig,
aenlic eoforcumbul. Waeron aescwigan,
secggas ymb sigecwen, sides gefysde.

(254-60)

(Until the warlike queen with her host should seek them again over the roads from the east. There were plainly seen on earls woven corslet and trusty sword, splendid armor, many helmets, excellent boarhelmet. The spear-warriors, the men around the victorious queen, were ready for journey.)

Elene's sapientia differs from Judith's and Juliana's insofar that it is not stressed in the beginning, but is bestowed upon her at the end of the narrative. However, Elene is already imbued with a certain degree of human wisdom. How else could she perceive the spiritual

³³ Kaske, Judith 18.

mysteries which impel her almost frantic desire to bring the cross back into light? It is her transcending from human to divine wisdom which makes her a more flexible character. Apart from the end of the poem, Elene's wisdom is mentioned only once, by herself:

Elene mapelode ond for eorlum spraec:
 "gehyrað, higegleawe, halige rune,
 word ond wisdom."

(332-34a)

(Elene spoke and uttered words before the men:
 "Listen, you wise men, to the holy secret, to my words and wisdom.")

That Elene attains the desired wisdom eventually, argues against Kaske's assertion that sapientia is totally withheld from her. The outstanding feature of the poem is Elene's quest for divine wisdom. She is a chosen handmaiden to God, serving Him by revealing the sacred objects. Elene is indirectly chosen by God through her son's mediation:

 Ond þa his modor het
 feran foldwege folca þreate
 to Judeum, georne secan
 wigena þreate, hwaer se wuldres beam
 halig under hrusan hyded waere,
 æðelcyninges rod. Elene ne wolde
 þaes siðfates saene weorðan
 ne ðæs wilgifan word gehyrwan
 hiere sylfre suna, ac wase sona gearu
 wif on willsið, swa hire woeruda helm,
 byrnwiggendra, beboden haefde."

(214b-24)

(And then he bade his mother to travel the road to the Jews with a troop of people, eagerly seek with a band of warriors where the glorious tree, the cross of the noble King was hidden in its holiness under the earth. Elene was not minded to hold back from

he journey, nor neglect the command of the giver of joy, her own son; but straightaway the woman was ready for desired journey, as the protector of hosts, of armored warriors has ordered.)

God has bestowed the vision of the cross upon Constantine. Constantine's dream vision about the cross instills an ardent desire in him to detect the cross. His quest for detection is transferred to Elene and becomes her quest for wisdom. Thus she is indirectly chosen by God as a handmaiden, a command she immediately pursues.

All the converts in Elene, including the antagonists, are represented from the start as privileged possessors of knowledge whose revelation constitutes conversion and salvation. The wisdom of the Jews is mentioned throughout the poem: wisestan (the wisest, 237), burgsittendum þam snoterestum (the wisest city dwellers, 276-7), forðsnottera (great in wisdom, 379), and sudorwisne (exceeding wise, 588). Moreover, the Jews' wisdom does not equate with Elene's because Elene is in search for Christian wisdom, and the Jewish wisdom equates only with their law and learning. Both Elene and the Jews possess a certain amount of wisdom, but just as the divine wisdom is concealed from the Jews, so the cross is hidden from Elene, or as Margaret Bridges put it:

Both the convert and the imperial envoy, then, progress from the paradoxical state of knowingly ignoring (Jewish transmission and repression) and ignorantly knowing (through books) respectively, to a state of perfect and harmonious illumination.³⁴

³⁴ Bridges 233.

Judas preceedes Elene in the attainment of sapientia, but that does not exclude her from their enjoyment.

Elene's handmaiden function is established in lines 669-82:

Him oncwæð hraðe caseres maeg:
 "hwaet, we ðaet hyrdon þurh halige bec
 haelledum cýðan, ðaet ahangen waes
 on Caluarie cyninges freobearn,
 godes gastsunu. þu scealt geagninga
 after stedewange, hwaer seo stow sie
 Calurie, aer þec cwealm nime,
 swilt, for synnum, ðaet ic hie syððan maege
 geclaensian Criste to willan,
 haelledum to helpe, ðaet me halig god
 gefylle, frea mihtig, feores ingeþanc,
 weoruda wuldorgeofa, willan minne,
 gasta geocend."

(The emperor's kinswoman spoke quickly to him: "Lo, we have heard that it was revealed to men by holy scriptures, that the King's noble child, God's spiritual Son, was hanged on Calvary. You shall tell me fully about the place, even as the writings say, where the spot on Calvary is, before death and destruction take you for your sins, so that afterwards I may purify it according to Christ's will, as a help unto men, so that holy God, the mighty Lord, the Giver of glory to hosts, the Succourer of souls, may satisfy the earnest thought of my life and my desire.")

An analysis of the passage above shows Elene's ardent desire to find the cross and the nails as her life purpose. Elene assumes an active role and expresses herself more emotionally than Judith and Juliana. It also seems that her identity is not as subjugated to God's will as Judith's and Juliana's.

Another example of her fervent desire for knowledge and divine wisdom, which propels her perseverance in finding the sacred objects, is found in lines 1078-79:

"'Mec þaera naegla gen
 on fyrhðsefan, fyrwet myngað.'"

("My eagerness for knowledge lets not my mind forget the nails.")

Knowledge does not equate with wisdom, but knowledge is a step for Elene on her way to divine wisdom, since through detecting the sacred objects she provides Christian knowledge for the Jews and divine wisdom for herself.

When she finally beholds the nails she exhibits an outburst of emotion:

þa waes wopes hring,
 hat heafodwylm ofer hleor goten,
 nalles for torne: tearas feollon
 ofer wira gespon. Wuldres gefylled
 cwene willa. Heo hie on cneow sette
 leohte geleafan, lac weorðode
 blissum hremig, þe hire brungen waea
 gnyrna to geoce. Gode þancode,
 sigora dryhtne, þæs þe hio soð gecneow
 andweardlice, þæt waes oft bodod
 feor aer beforan fram fruman worulde
 folcum to frofre. Heo gefulled waes
 widomes gife, ond þa wic beheold
 halig heofonlic gast, hreƿer weardode,
 æðelne inno. Swa hie aelmihtig
 sigebearn godes siððan freo ode.

(1132a-47)

(Then there was a sound of weeping, hot gushes of tears on her cheeks, not at all from sorrow. Tears fell on the nails of twisted wire. The queen's desire was gloriously fulfilled. She knelt down in joyous faith; she honored the gift, gladly exulting, which was brought to her as solace in her sadness. She thanked God, the Lord of victories, that she now knew the truth which long before from the beginning of the world had often been proclaimed as a comfort to the people. She was filled with the gift of wisdom and a holy divine spirit dwelt within her, filled her breast, her noble heart. So the almighty, triumphant Son of God from then on guarded her.)

Lines 1143-47 demonstrate that Elene receives the gift of wisdom and the holy divine spirit. Moreover, God will guard her from now on. Elene is full of bliss and

content because she finally found the sacred objects, thus having fulfilled her desire and partially her function as a handmaiden of God. Moreover, her quest for divine wisdom is satisfied by God who bestows it upon her. Consequently, like Judith and Juliana, she has achieved sapientia.

On a spiritual level the poem represents a struggle between the good and the evil, although it does not deal with polar embodiments of pure good or evil, the wholly saved and the unequivocally damned. The Jews themselves have been misled by the devil into ignoring, forgetting and repressing first-hand knowledge of the Saviour and his relics:

Swa se ealda feond
forlaerde ligesearwum leode, fortyhte
Judea cyn, ðæt hie god sylfne
ahengon, herga fruman.

(207b-210a)

(As the ancient foe with his wiles led the Jewish people astray, so that they hanged God Himself, the Prince of hosts.)

In contrast to the treatment of Judith and Juliana, Cynewulf depicts the spiritual warfare from the devil's point of view. Elene in her spiritual warfare has to encounter directly the forces of darkness and ignorance. The forces of darkness are defined as the devil and his subordinates, who keep the sacred cross and nails concealed in order to prevent the Jews (microcosm) and the whole world (macrocosm) from obtaining the true wisdom, evoking

the archetypal battle between Christ and Satan. Furthermore, the forces of darkness inflict blind ignorance onto the Jews, with whom Elene fights her battles for the detection of the cross, although it is actually Judas who engages in the final battle with the personified devil.

On an allegorical level Elene is portrayed as Church. In association with the military allusion she is referred to as Church Militant, who comes to a foreign territory under the protection of a strong military escort, almost forcibly attempting to convert her subjects.³⁵ Thomas Hill, among others, suggests that Elene has to be regarded as a figure of the Church confronting the Synagogue.³⁶ As a regal figure she confronts and refutes the learnings of the Jews, an act which immediately suggests the image of Church. The contrast between Jewish learnings and Christian wisdom is clearly articulated at the beginning of Elene's confrontation with the Jews, when she summons the wisest of the Jews to a council:

	"Ge þa sciran miht
deman ongunnon	ond gedwolan lifdon,
þeostrum gepancum,	oð þysne daeg.
Gangað nu snude,	snyttro gepencas
weras wisfaeste,	wordes craeftige
þa þe eowre ae	aeðelum craeftige
on ferhsefan	frymest haebben,
þa me soðlice	secgan cunnon,
andsware cyðan	for eowic for
tacna gehwylces,	þe ic him to sece."

³⁶ Thomas D. Hill, "Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English Elene," Traditio 27 (1971): 164.

³⁷ Hill 166.

(310b-19)

("You condemned the radiant power, and have lived in error, with dark thoughts, until this day. Go now quickly, with wisdom think of men exceeding wise and skilled in speech, who, strong in virtues, do especially store in their mind your law, who can truly tell me, render me before you, the answer I seek from them for every marvel.")

The contrast is expressed in terms of the depth and mystery of the Christian's wisdom as opposed to the learning, the word and the law of the Jews. In the remainder of Elene's initial confrontation with the Jews, the theme of the spiritual blindness of the Jews first occurs. Elene's next meeting with the Jews is concerned with the spiritual as opposed to the literal understanding of the Old Testament. Elene cites various Messianic passages from the Old Testament, but since full understanding of these scriptures is based on the realization that these prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament, the Jews cannot grasp their meaning. The queen accuses the Jews of being blind to the typological bond linking the historical Jesus to the Old Testament prophecies of which He was the fulfillment. Elene's fuller spiritual world-view --as opposed to the Jews'-- corresponds to her later achievement of still fuller knowledge, which form a plot within the plot.

In the end the image of Church Militant transforms itself to the traditional personification of the Church as a queen who refutes and chastizes the unbelievers and who graciously welcomes the converts. After Elene's quest is

fulfilled, she assumes the role of Church as teacher:

pa seo cwen ongan
 laeran leofra heap, paet hie lufan dryhtnes
 ond sybbe swa same sylfra betweenum,
 freondraeddenne, faest gelaeston
 leahtorlease in hira lifes tid
 ond paes latteowes larum hyrdon,
 cristenum þeawum, þe him Cyriacus
 bude boca gleaw.

(1205a-12a)

(Then the queen began to teach the crowd of loved men that they, sinless in their lives, should firmly hold to the love of God and also to peace, friendship between themselves, and they should obey the counsels of the leader, the Christian customs, which Cyriacus, learned in books, proclaimed to them.)

In the previous passage she repeats Christ's commandments to the human race. Her speech is comparable to the last speech of Juliana, which invites the bystanders to imitation. Furthermore, Elene assumes the role of the peaceweaver, and thus the role of the Valkyrie like Wealtheow in Beowulf. Elene symbolizes the pledge between the nations that keep the peace between the Jews and the Romans, and allegorically the reconciliation between the Jews and God. Her farewell speech illustrates Elene's personal attainment of divine wisdom. Her hostile tone towards the Jews earlier in the poem is replaced by a benign and peaceful one. Elene, like Judith and Juliana, can be defined as an instrument of God's eternal will, since God provided the vision for Constantine, who delegates the quest to his mother. Elene joins Judith and Juliana as heroic handmaidens of God, for Elene assumes a mediator role between her son and God, as well as between

humankind and God.

Judith, the warrior-woman, Juliana, the virgin-martyr, and Elene, the battle-queen transformed into a peaceweaver, all demonstrate --more or less-- the heroic ideal of sapientia and fortitudo. Human sapientia and fortitudo is vital to the survival of people in the heroic age, but these heroic virtues, are not guaranteed to last. Even Beowulf, the perservering combination of both heroic virtues must die at last. The imperfection, mutability, and final impermanence of human sapientia and fortitudo are surpassed by the Sapientia and Fortitudo of God, perfect, unchanging, and everlasting.

The traditional epic male Anglo-Saxon warrior fights for the welfare of his society, knowing that he is doomed to fail in the end. The three females succeed in their corporal and spiritual warfare, growing even stronger. They engage in warfare armed with and for abstract virtues, like wisdom and faith, the good against the spiritual evil, the devil. In their struggle they do not fight for their worldly society but for God's heavenly kingdom. They are chosen and supported by God through His Fortitudo and Sapientia, thus becoming His handmaidens in the struggle against evil.

Since they are successful in their warfare, bestowed with divine wisdom, they become symbols for excellent behavior on earth leading to salvation in heaven. Their

outstanding feature is wisdom, granted to them by God, which enables them to fight as women against physical enemies --male warriors--, and the spiritual enemy the devil. In all three poems the women overcome their antagonists because of their superior divine wisdom.

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